

MSFC Safety Bulletins

'Going Away' Causes Painful 'Bumps of Knowledge'

What Happened?

An employee fell down the steps in the east stairwell of Building 4201. The fall resulted in painful twisting of the right ankle and both wrists, scraping of the right knee, scratches to the right hand, and soreness in both knees and ankles.

What Caused The Incident?

The employee stepped on the hemline of her dress, and fell.

What Are The Possible Root Causes?

- Long dresses can require one hand to grasp and raise the fabric out of the way, when climbing up or down.
- If objects are being carried, as well, this can leave no hands free to hold the handrail.
- Sharp-edged heels on shoes can snag dress fabric.
- The design of many high heeled shoes may be less stable than flat-soled shoes, making it more difficult to recover your balance after tripping.
- Attention to foot placement may be reduced by haste, engaging in other activities, and/or unrelated thoughts.



What Can Be Done?

- Avoid use of stairways when wearing long dresses or skirts.
- Avoid use of sharp-edged heels when wearing long dresses or skirts.
- Choose flat-soled shoes for greater stability and better balance recovery.
- When using stairways, always keep one hand free to hold handrails.
- Knowing slips, trips, and falls are more likely on stairs than on flat walking surfaces, pay closer attention to our environment & actions on stairs.

What Lessons Can We Learn?

- **'Going Away'**: A description of what we do when our thoughts focus on something other than the activity we are engaged in.
- We **all** do this at times, and for many reasons.
- Whether short or long, it **blinds us to important clues** about how to protect ourselves from injury.
- **If we avoid 'Going Away' when the accident risk is higher than normal, we improve our ability to avoid painful 'bumps of knowledge'.**